

# Turkistan

## Peoples of the Central Asian Plains

By Sirdar Ikbal Ali Shah, F.R.G.S., F.R.A.S.

Writer and Lecturer on India and Central Asia

*This chapter deals with that portion of Turkistan which was emancipated from Russian rule as a result of the Great War. Supplementing the earlier chapters on Bokhara, Khiva, and Sin-Kiang, it completes our survey of the peoples in this region of Asia whose political associations are somewhat unstable*

THE Central Asian area known somewhat locally to-day as Turkistan, and forming an autonomous republic, is bounded on the north and north-east by the Steppes, on the north-west by the Sea of Aral, on the south-west by Khiva, on the south by Bokhara, and on the east by Sin-Kiang.

For the most part it is a level and well-watered plain, wild and uncultivated in places, but towards the south-east, in which the only cities of importance are situated, the habits of the people are agricultural and commercial.

Roughly speaking the inhabitants of Turkistan may be divided into those of Persian origin and those of Turkish race. The original inhabitants, the Tajiks, seem to have peopled the country between the Syr-Daria and the Amu-Daria.

The Turkish races were comparatively late immigrants into this region, and when they did enter it they seem to have driven its Iranian inhabitants into the mountain country or the towns. Thus in the cities of Bokhara, Samarkand, and Khojend, the Tajiks form the main element of the population, while on the



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#### DOUGHTY TURCOMAN WARRIORS OF GEOK TEPE

A stalwart people and a brave one, with no grain of servility in their character, the Turcomans are renowned for their fiery pride of race. Their martial tastes are strongly developed, and often lead them to seek military service outside their country. They make formidable soldiers, and the Cross of S. George, for valour, adorns the breast of many who served with the Russian legions

*Photo, Maynard Owen Williams*

right bank of the Syr-Daria, people of Turkish race prevail.

The descendants of the Turkish tribes who at various times migrated into Central Asia are known as Uzbeks, a term which means "free" or "independent." They are said to be divided into ninety-two clans or families, each of which has its divisions and subdivisions. Most of these still pursue a nomad life under certain restrictions. The Kirghiz are also of Uzbek stock, and the Turcomans were certainly a similar confederacy of the same race.

The Tajik is, as a rule, a taller and heavier man, by no means active in his habits, and with a tendency towards mendacity. The Uzbek is thinner and

more wiry, with a long, strongly-marked face, and is simple in his manners and dress. He regards the Tajik with contempt, while the Tajik looks upon him as a child of nature who is scarcely responsible for his actions. All the same the Uzbek has a national and racial consciousness which the Tajik lacks.

The Tajik speaks a dialect of Persian which has been influenced by the Turki dialect, but nevertheless it retains many ancient words and expressions of Aryan origin which are not used in modern Persian. The Uzbeks speak Turki or a certain dialect of that tongue. Tajiki is, however, the language of culture and literature.



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The population of this region has been estimated at nearly two million souls, one half of whom are nomads. Besides the two races named there are traces of others in the country, especially Persians, Arabs, Hebrews, and Hindus. The Jews have indeed been in the country for centuries and carrying on a trade as moneylenders. The Hindus are usually merchants who visit the country temporarily from the neighbourhood of Shikarpur. The Lurs, who are probably the ancestors of the European gypsies, trade in horses, tell fortunes, and lead a nomadic life.

Agriculture is carried on in a manner quite archaic, tools and implements are of the most primitive character, but, this notwithstanding, the art of irrigation is thoroughly understood and practised.

Cotton is extensively planted, and large and valuable crops have been forthcoming. But of late years the

mulberry plantations have suffered sadly. On the other hand valuable deposits of coal and oil have been discovered in the neighbourhood of Samarkand, and in such abundance as to justify the belief that when these resources have been fully exploited Turkistan will be in a position to take its place among the rising commercial communities of the East.

In the mountains of Kara-tau appears the upper strata of carboniferous limestone which may indicate a true coal-producing strata at a lower level. Coal is also found at Khojend and elsewhere, but it is of the variety known as "brown" coal, useful enough for fuel and for smith-work, but of no avail for such metallurgical operations as the reduction of iron ore.

Such coal as I saw in Turkistan appeared to be too friable and too much mixed with stone, and the difficulty of its transport through the mountains



### SIGHTLESS EYES THAT CLAIM TO FORESEE THE FUTURE

Divination as a lucrative business is firmly established throughout the Orient. Crystal-gazing is one well-known method, and sand-diviners ply a good trade in many Eastern bazaars. A variant of sand divination is practised by this blind fortune-teller in Khokan, capital of the Ferghana province of Turkistan; he predicts the future of his clients by the disposition of little heaps of pebbles

*Photo, Maynard Owen Williams*





#### BEFORE THE MADRASAH ULUG BEG IN THE SQUARE OF SAMARKAND

Samarkand, an oasis city, has been described as a "jewel set in sand." Its luxuriant gardens, architectural splendours, and the fact that it was the scene of the Arabian Nights' story-telling, explain the glamour that glorifies it in the Eastern eye. The Righistan, the beautiful public square, is fringed by three fine madrasahs, or colleges, one of which is named after the astronomer, Ulug Beg

*Photo, Miss Hunter*



#### RHYTHMIC DANCE OF SARIKOLIS IN THEIR CHARACTERISTIC GARB

Dressed in long, dressing-gown coats, quilted, and usually tied round the waist by a narrow band, the Sarikolis present a comical spectacle as they perform the ungainly steps which they call dancing. While the slow shuffling of their feet is in progress their arms, cased in ludicrously long sleeves, are brought into play, the whole accompanied by the "orchestra" in the background

*Photo, Sir Percy Sykes*





#### BURLY MEMBERS OF AN EASTERN PASTORAL TRIBE

The grassy stretches of land lying near Lake Aral form the pasture-ground of various communities, chief among which are the Kirghiz of Uzbeg stock. They are nomads, and, possessing extensive flocks and herds, pass from pasture zone to pasture zone according to the season. Their homes are but a collection of movable tents, and their livestock often represents the whole of their worldly wealth.



#### NOMADS FROM THE STEPPE-LAND OF WESTERN TURKISTAN

Far from prepossessing are these Kirghiz with their high cheek-bones, narrow eyes, and broad, flat faces; but they are singularly wiry of constitution, and well-fitted for the roving life they lead about the wide plains and the mountain slopes of Turkistan. Their clothing is chiefly made from the wool and skins of their livestock which comprises horses, sheep, goats, and sometimes oxen and camels.

*Photos, Florence Farmborough*



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### AGED EASTERN ECCLESIASTIC

He is a priest of Sarikol, and dwells with his blood-brothers, the Sarikolis, below the famous Tagdumbash Pamir. The Sarikolis are followers of the Aga Khan of Bombay

*Photo, Sir Percy Sykes*

is a serious drawback. Lead ore is plentiful, especially in the Kara-tau mountains, but already these mines have been pretty well worked, and the quantities which remain are difficult to smelt. Iron and copper are also found, but such gold as remains is extremely difficult to win.

Samarkand, famous in poetry and legend, is surrounded by a halo of romance. For centuries it has preserved the traditions of a past

magnificence in an atmosphere of mysterious impenetrability. In the time of Alexander the Great it was a large and flourishing city, and the world-conqueror made it his headquarters in his expeditions against the Scythians.

Alexander's exploits are still preserved by legend and are known to every inhabitant. The ruins of the mosque of Shah Zindeh still retain their appearance of ancient splendour, and are among the finest in Central Asia, the enamelled bricks and inlay of alabaster being in the best style of Persian art. The madrasah, or college, of Bibi Khanym, the favourite wife of Timur or Tamerlane, and the daughter of the Emperor of China, possesses a marvellous double dome, but now does duty as a horse market.

One of the chief centres of the town is the Righistan, or market square, where are three of the principal colleges. On the top of some rising ground to the south of the fortress is the tomb of Timur, gorgeously decorated with alabaster and transparent gypsum. The tombstone occupies the exact centre of the mosque, and is composed of a slab of greenish-black stone six feet long, and fifteen inches wide.

The citadel is an imposing building, and contains several mosques as well as the former place of the Ameer, and the Kok-tash, or sacred stone which served as the foundation for the throne of Timur. There are other remains of the flourishing period of Samarkand in the city. The bazaars of the place are, however, much less imposing and interesting than those at Tashkend and Khojend. The chief portion of the old bazaar is the Timi, a large, octagonal, covered building where smaller articles are sold, and there are separate buildings for silk and cotton goods.

In Tashkend, the administrative centre, the streets are rambling and shaded by trees overtopping the walls on either side. Many of the prospects of the place recall rural conditions, so suddenly does one come upon old mills turning sleepily by the verge of half-





WAITING FOR CHANCE CUSTOM AT A CORNER OF ASKHABAD

Settled industries are still comparatively few and small in the Transcaspian regions bordering on the south-west of Turkistan, but wherever men go shod the shoemaker is sure of a livelihood. This grey-haired cobbler, with so meagre an outfit, is a Persian in business at Askhabad, a town of growing commercial importance on the Transcaspian railway that runs from Krasnovodsk to Samarkand

*Photo, Maynard Owen Williams*





**HORSE MARKET AT SAMARKAND, BY THE COLLEGE THAT COMMEMORATES TAMERLANE'S FAVOURITE WIFE**  
 Glamour of romance invests the very name of Samarkand. As Maracanda it was a mighty city when conquered by Alexander the Great in 329 B.C. A thousand years later it was conquered by the Arabs, and became a centre of the intellectual and religious life of Mahomedan Asia. Tamerlane's capital, it still contains his tomb, the famous shrine of his companion Shah Zindeh, and some architecturally wondrous madrasahs or colleges. Among these is the domed college of Bibi Khanym, Tamerlane's Chinese wife, now used as the market for Samarkand's great trade in horses and asses

*Photo, Miss Hunter*





**KIRGHIZ OF TURKISTAN'S HIGHLANDS LOADING UP THEIR YAKS PREPARATORY TO MOVING CAMP**

In its purely wild state the yak lives only in the central plateau of Tibet, where it attains a height of six feet at the shoulder. Very little inferior to this animal, however, is the domesticated "grunting ox," in use among the natives of the Pamirs. Immensely strong and hardy, this yak is black, with long, shaggy hair on the belly and flanks, and with a bushy tail that makes an excellent fly-whisk. In the hands of the Kirghiz the yak is a docile beast, but it is apt to attack Europeans. It is intolerant of heat, and can only live at high elevations, where it is invaluable as a beast of burden.

*Photo, Sir Percy Sykes*





#### PLAYING A POPULAR GAME IN THE PAMIRS: THE SCRIMMAGE

The game is known as "baigu," and the "ball" is a decapitated goat. The players, men long past the prime of life and sturdy young lads, are splendid riders who, almost cradled on horseback, can perform astonishing feats astride their wiry, little unshod horses. No spurs are used, and the stirrups are short and wide, enabling the riders to spring easily to the ground

*Photo, Sir Percy Sykes*

dried water courses, and ruined mosques surrounded by tall poplars. Small madrasahs or colleges are everywhere, and it is said that in the more retired quarters of the city old Mussulmans reside who pass their lives in prayer and contemplation, never leaving their houses.

But there is a modern Tashkend as there is a modern Samarkand, and the old buildings are slowly but surely being swept away to make room for new edifices built by Russian or Indian architects, which contrast rather sadly with the more sombre relics of the past which surround them.

The prosperity of the place is entirely dependent on its water supply. All the water is brought from the river Chirchik by a canal nearly sixteen miles in length. The city is divided into four quarters which were originally four separate villages or tribal cantonments, and each of these

has, or rather had, its separate elders and chief of police. The inhabitants are chiefly of the Uzbeg race, but most of the merchants are Hindus and Tajiks.

Khojend is perhaps the most pleasant of any of the cities of Turkistan, and this is due to its situation on the river bank. It is mostly inhabited by Tajiks. Towards the end of the summer the river Khojend frequently dries up, and the city then suffers from want of water, and these conditions are greatly aggravated by the heat, which at that season of the year is intense.

In the corner of the town, not far from the river, is the old citadel, built on an artificial square mound, one hundred feet or more in height. Access to this fortalice is gained by a steep path and from the summit a magnificent view of the surrounding country may be had. From the hollow sound of one's footsteps on this mound, I rather suspect





#### PICKING UP THE "BALL" IN THE HAZARDOUS GAME OF BAIGU

Here a player is seen bending from his saddle in the act of picking up the "ball," with which he has to gallop round a post and return to the starting-point. He is hotly pursued by the other players on their shaggy, tousled horses, and strenuous efforts are made to overtake him, to surround him, and to snatch the "ball" away before he can proclaim himself victor.

*Photo, Sir Percy Sykes*

that it has been built on a wooden framework, only half filled in with earth; indeed, there is a legend that several soldiers once fell through the floor of the citadel and were never heard of again.

Khojend, which is on the direct road from Khokan to Bokhara, was at one time a place of considerable commercial importance, but since it was occupied by the Russians its trade has languished. For centuries it was an apple of discord between Khokan and Bokhara, and was an appanage of one or the other.

Turkistan was conquered by Alexander of Macedon, one of whose generals, after his death, made it part of the territory of the Graeco-Bactrian dynasty, which lasted until about 130 B.C. This was succeeded by the Yuetchji, apparently a nomad tribe living in the Steppes. While still under their rule it was attacked by the Arabs, who in A.D. 710 introduced Islam. Persian and Turkish princes in their

turn took the place of the Arab dynasty, and at last Jenghiz Khan overran the country in 1221, almost destroying Samarkand. The dynasty of Jenghiz was overthrown by Timur, who made Samarkand his capital, and spared no pains in embellishing and beautifying it.

The country seems to have been under Turkish rule until, in 1868, it was captured by the Russians, who were then at war with the Bokharans, the suzerains of Turkistan. In 1866 the Ameer of Bokhara arranged a treaty with the Russian General Kaufmann by which the boundaries of Turkistan were agreed upon, but this led to hostilities and the subsequent annexation of the country. Samarkand was occupied and the whole region gradually came under Muscovite rule.

Russian rule in Turkistan was for the most part a mere military bureaucracy dictated in a hard and fast manner from Petrograd, and its prime object was to

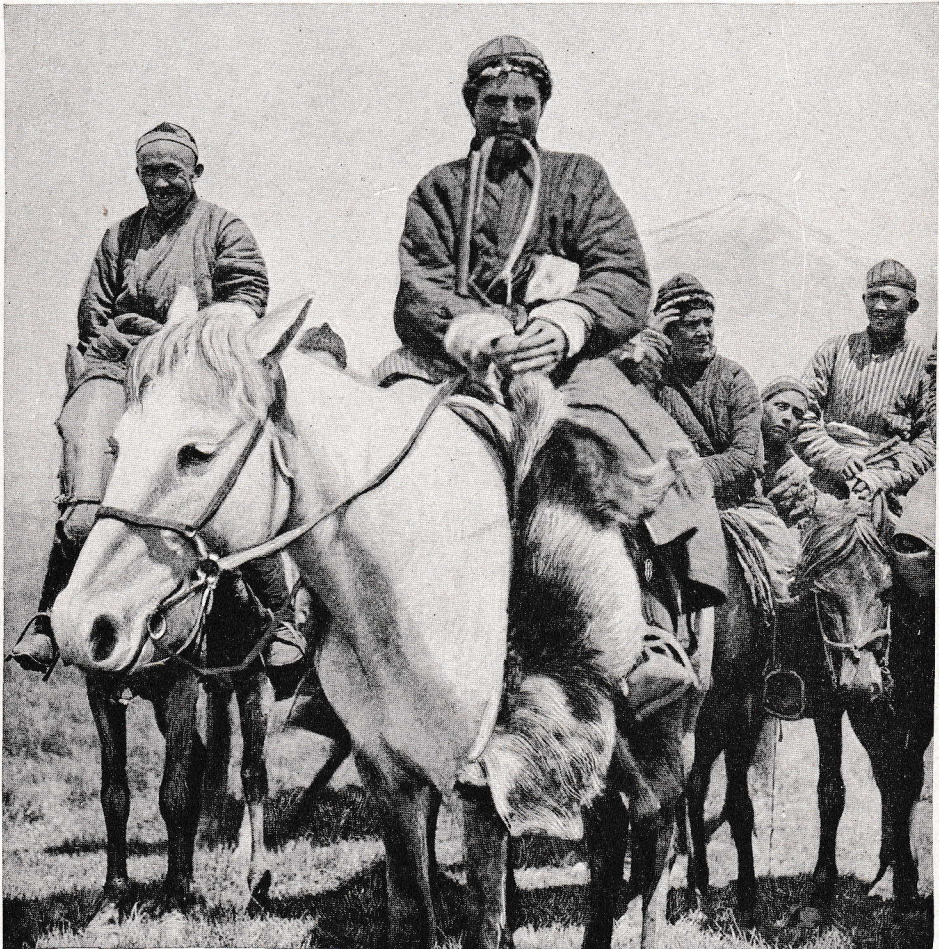


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make of Turkistan a centre whence the other Central Asian khanates might be attacked and annexed. The inhabitants were at once subjected to a taxation of the most onerous description, but every year showed a deficit in the budget.

Still, the primary objects which led to the occupation of Turkistan were rather military than financial. Turkistan was a link in the ever-growing chain between Petrograd and India, and as such, it was necessary to maintain it in a fitting manner—a policy the Slavonic race has by no means lost sight of.

Russian rule in Turkistan did not assist the prestige of the European races in Central Asia. The loose social life of the governing classes, and especially of the Russian officer corps, the introduction of paper money and the ineptitude of the Muscovite officials brought European credit into contempt among the sober and well-behaved Moslem population. But within recent years a national consciousness has sprung up in Turkistan which must sooner or later have developments of the utmost importance for all the Central Asian states.

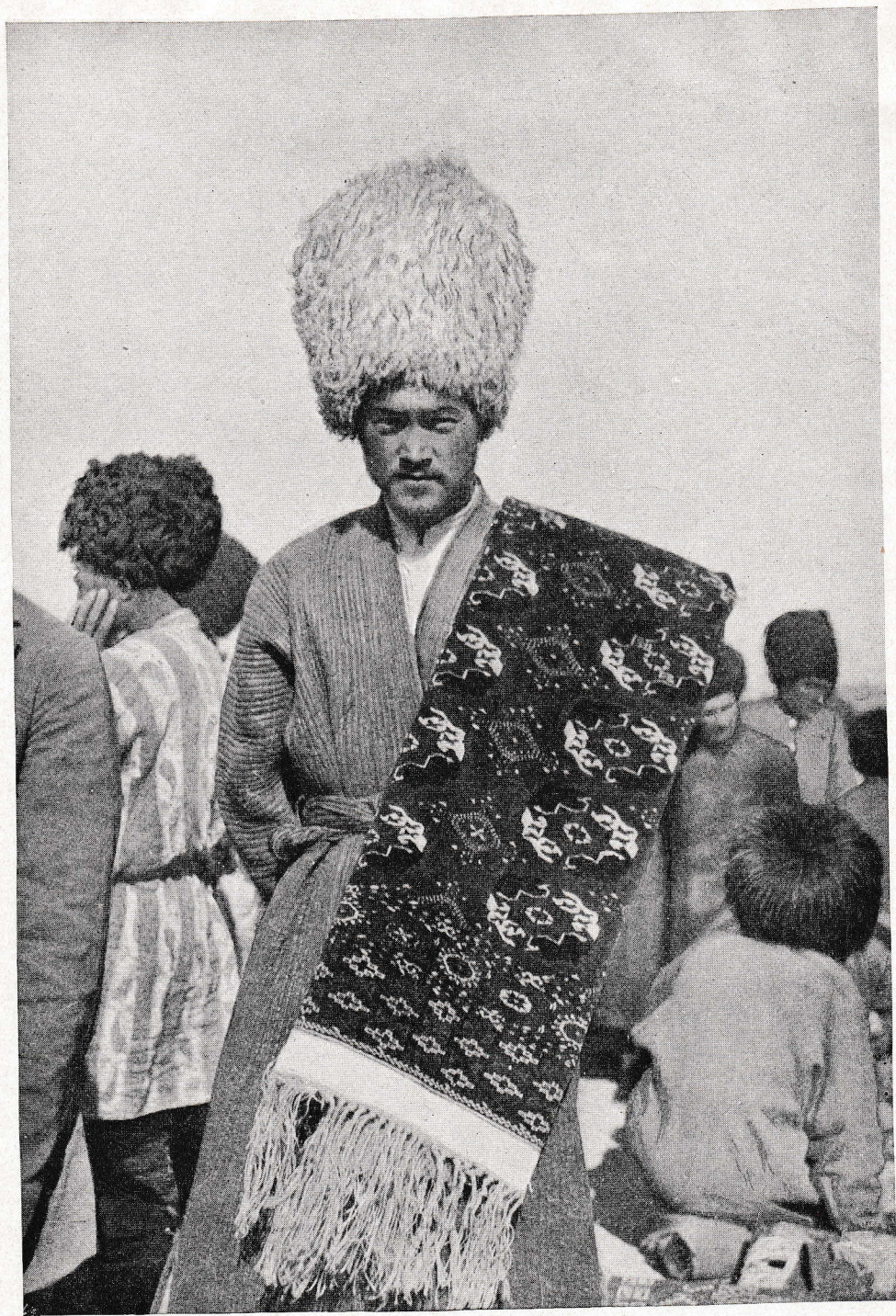


AFTER THE FRAY: THE SMILING VICTOR AND HIS PRIZE

Having successfully repulsed the onslaughts of the attacking parties, the triumphant rider has gained the starting-point with the "ball" in his possession. Here he pauses, his hands clutching the trophy, his short-handled whip—a valued article, no whit less formidable than the Cossack nagaika—between his teeth, while he is vociferously acclaimed victor, and is rewarded with a silk handkerchief

*Photo, Sir Percy Sykes*





**LOVELY PRODUCT OF A TURKISTAN LOOM TO TEMPT THE CONNOISSEUR**  
Specimen carpets from the looms of Merv and Bokhara are commonly exhibited for sale in the markets of Turkistan spread over the shoulder of some Turcoman vender, contrasting finely with his coloured coat and sheep-skin busby. It is the habit of these salesmen to affect indifference as they display these beautiful fabrics, but in reality they have a keen eye for a customer

*Photo, Maynard Owen Williams*





#### CHARMING STUDY OF A UKRAINIAN MAIDEN

She is wearing the festal costume of her district—skirt, apron, blouse and jacket of native-woven material and embroidered by her own nimble fingers. Even the garments of the poorest peasants display work of lovely design, and the artistic stitching in coloured silks and cottons noticeable in the attire of fashionable London or Paris is often an imitation of the needlework of the Ukrainian women

*Photo, Underwood Press Service*